

UCLG – Forum of Regions

The agenda of regions for contributing to the 2030 Agenda

1. Federated states (*Länders* or provinces) in federal countries and regional governments (counties or departments) in unitary countries, as well as subnational governments as a whole, play a growing role in territorial governance and development schemes – both at an economic, social, cultural and environmental levels. Their role is equally important when it comes to guaranteeing territorial cohesion at a national and continental levels, being key actors in the articulation of rural and urban systems. Therefore, they are essential for the realization of 2030 Agenda and all global agendas adopted by the United Nations (New Urban Agenda, climate change, disaster prevention, protection of biodiversity...).
2. Their role has been reinforced in the last decades. Since the 1980s, many federal countries adopted measures that reinforced the role of federated states; a process sometimes referred to as “neo-federalism”. In parallel, many unitary countries initiated processes of territorial reorganization leading to the creation or reinforcement of regional governments (“new regionalism”). The recognition of the intermediate level of government has been decisive to boost the effectiveness and viability of the regional and cohesion policies of the EU.
3. Nonetheless, it should also be noted how the advances in the autonomy of regional governments has been unequal and, in many cases, there is still a gap between the legal-constitutional framework and reality. It is clear that, nowadays, federal states are *de jure* those that show the highest levels of regional autonomy, competences and resources. In terms of regional autonomy, they are followed by countries with advanced decentralization processes which enabled regions to emerge with their own organizational political structure, despite a long centralist or unitary tradition. At the other extreme, many regions still operate as deconcentrated entities or are not yet in a position to fully benefit from greater autonomy.
4. Transfer of competences and powers is often not enough for intermediate levels of government to be able to fully perform their functions. In spite of being recognized by the constitution of federal countries, the leeway of federated governments may be hampered by the lack of sufficient and clearly allocated financial resources. *This is especially self-evident in the poorest territories or in those that are farthest away from decision-making, as in the sub-Saharan context (with some exceptions in federal or quasi-federal countries such as South Africa).*
5. Beyond certain common features, **federalism and regionalization are characterized worldwide by a great diversity and complexity**. Most countries still require a better understanding on how responsibilities and capacities are distributed among different levels of government, as well as on how they can collaborate. The same applies to adequate financing and compensation and leveling mechanisms capable of reducing inequalities between regions and territories, which are key in terms of promoting national development in a way that fully benefits from the potential of each territory.

6. In order to favor balanced sustainable development models that put people at the center and make the most of their potential and capacities, territorial development strategies require better articulated national, regional and local policies, as well as coherent development plans that support the strengths and opportunities of each territory.
7. Therefore, it is necessary to promote **multilevel governance** in a way that optimizes the existing relation between different levels of government. To be effective, multilevel governance should be based on the principle of subsidiarity, on the respect for local autonomy and on the establishment of trust and structured dialogue mechanisms. For subnational governments, multilevel governance can be a way to achieve their expectations and objectives and contribute to the proper functioning and execution of coherent and efficient public policies. In this regard, multilevel governance should complement regional and local governments' demand for autonomous and ambitious territorial governance.
8. In addition, multilevel governance requires greater collaboration between regions and municipalities. In a system where financial responsibilities and capacities are fragmented, regional and local governments have no choice but to cooperate with each other if they seek to extend their visibility and relevance face to their own national governments and communities in terms of development. Effective multilevel governance can be a means to encourage emulation in the provision of more efficient services between territories, which can lead to a virtuous circle of investment within the framework of cooperation programs. Territorial cooperation – through the vertical and horizontal integration of local and regional governments, regardless of their size, function and scope - tends to transcend administrative boundaries and borders.
9. In recent decades, the impact of traditional territorial development policies, generally promoted by the central government from a top-down approach, has been questioned because of its inability to bring about “balanced” territorial development. Widening social gaps and inequalities between territories threatens economic growth, both in developed and developing economies, increases the risk of political instability and erodes the potential for sustainable development. For this reason, the 2030 Agenda has integrated the need to “reduce inequality within and among countries” (goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs).
10. New global challenges demand greater cooperation between territories in order to bring forward a response that transcends borders and **that reflects the needs of local populations and the political will of territorial authorities**. Regions are both the scene and a stakeholder of globalization. Many of them have key political competences, necessary to guarantee effective national policies and the progress of the global agendas. Our perspective, within UCLG, is clear: just as cities and municipalities emerge through their networks as new international actors, **so regions and their networks must take a qualitative leap** in creating or taking part of international networks, projecting their goals and strategic priorities outwardly. It is necessary to move towards greater coordination and cooperation between different levels of governance in order to ensure that regionalization processes are managed as efficiently as possible.

Defining an international agenda for regions and intermediate governments is therefore a priority for UCLG and its Forum of Regions:

Essential features for an international agenda of regions:

- 1. Reaffirm the commitment of regions to the implementation of the SDGs and other global agendas** (New Urban Agenda, climate change, disaster prevention, protection of biodiversity...). Regional governments play an essential role in territorial planning, economic development, poverty reduction, food security, the provision of strategic infrastructures and environmental management, among many others. Therefore, regions play a decisive role in promoting a more equitable and sustainable development that favors social and territorial cohesion with a view to “leave no one behind” and prevent environmental degradation.
- 2. Promote the adoption of regional development strategies that are more integrated and aligned with the SDGs**, facilitating the active participation of territorial networks and local stakeholders in the promotion of inclusive territorial development models. These models should rely on endogenous development – that is, activities anchored in the territory, favoring the strengthening of local capacities, innovation, the mobilization of local resources, protecting natural resources and encouraging cooperation and territorial balance (urban-rural) with a view to generate complementarities and synergies between different regions and within each of them. Mapping the needs of each territory could be a way to kick-off this strategy, enabling the development of appropriate provisions and consistent follow-up mechanisms.
- 3. Strengthen multilevel governance in order to harmonize territorial priorities with national plans and vice versa (bottom-up) as well as ensure equitable development between territories.** Different administrative levels inevitably have overlapping competences; their cooperation is thus essential in order to achieve sustainable development. Strengthening multi-level governance and achieving an adequate enabling environment for regions (recognition of their autonomy, strengthening their administrative, financial and technical functioning) should help consolidate a clear and responsible dialogue between national governments, local governments and other stakeholders: civil society, academia, private sector, etc. To this end, UCLG has launched its Policy Council on Multi-level Territorial Governance and Sustainable Financing.
- 4. Encourage cooperation between regions, and between regions and local governments,** fostering international cooperation, the exchange of experiences and capacity-building, with the aim of promoting collective solutions and establishing synergies between territories. Cooperation between territories, including supranational and cross-border territorial cooperation through alliances or networks, is essential to promote sustainable development.
- 5. Contribute to the monitoring and follow-up on the role of regions in the realization of the 2030 Agenda** – and of other global agendas –, fostering the establishment of governance, articulation, implementation and monitoring mechanisms at the regional level, adapting the systems of indicators and generating regional reports that contribute to the National Voluntary Reports (VNRs) in different countries, and to the global reports of the regional and local governments to the United Nations High Level Political Forum, facilitated by UCLG (through the annual and GOLD Report). Work on the priorities set by the Hangzhou World Council and the Policy Council on Multi-level Governance and Sustainable Financing.

6. Work on the priorities set by the Hangzhou World Council

- Policy Council on Multi-level Governance and Sustainable Financing
- Community of Practice on Territorial governance, Food Security and Nutrition Transition
- Community of Practice on Transparency and Accountability
- UCLG Waves of Action: Housing, Financing and Migration
- Committee: Culture, Strategic Urban Planning and Local Economic and Social Development
- Gender Perspective